



Accessibility Advisory Committee

300 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

September 2, 2025

Dear Chair Santos, and Members of the Board,

It is my pleasure to present you with the AAC report for the month of July 2025. The primary issues we reviewed were: 1) Jurisdictional Bill – Eligibility Process, 2) Better Bus Network - Update, 3) MetroAccess Service Updates.

Issues of the Month

Jurisdictional Bill – Eligibility Process:

Maryland House Bill 450, titled "Maryland Transit Administration - Disability Reduced Fare Program - Renewal for Permanently Disabled Individuals," was passed and signed into law. This bill mandates that the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) automatically renew the Disability Reduced Fare Program certification for individuals who are permanently disabled. Previously, participants in the program had to re-certify their eligibility periodically, but this new legislation eliminates that requirement for those with permanent disabilities. The bill takes effect on October 1, 2025.

Although the MTA bill is for Maryland's reduced fare program, it was discussed at the June 21st MetroAccess Subcommittee (MAS) meeting, advocating similar actions be taken for MetroAccess Eligibility process. The discussion was moved to the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) and was discussed further at its July 7th meeting. Members of the AAC along with other disability community stakeholders are advocating for WMATA to adopt this policy but also apply it to paratransit eligibility. This would result in MetroAccess automatically renewing the eligibility certification for individuals with permanent disabilities, removing the burden (on persons with permanent disabilities) of periodic re-certification.

Staff has countered by stating the philosophical placing a permanent label on a person related to their ability to use fixed-route service conflicts with the goals of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and WMATA, which has led the nation in accessible fixed route services. Although a person's disability may be permanent, the inability to use the fixed-route services may not be permanent.

Better Bus Network - Update:

Al Himes, Director, Bus Service Planning and Scheduling, stated the Better Bus Network (BBN) started two weeks ago on Sunday, June 29th. He informed that there are a few minor issues that were observed, however the overall rollout was very successful. Mr. Himes stated we are working on making corrections to about 150 to 200 of the 7,500 to 8,000 bus stop signs in our service area. Some corrections are being made to the electronic data systems as a few stops are not being announced by the buses. All the items found during the first two weeks of operation where minor corrections were needed, have been adjusted, and will be effective Sunday, July 27th. Mr. Himes stated we will continue to evaluate the service and make additional tweaks as we discover things that need to be adjusted.

The AAC was concerned about the eliminated stops and the inconvenience customers may experience, particularly, people with disabilities. Mr. Himes informed that all the comments WMATA receives, will be reviewed for any possible adjustments.

MetroAccess Service Updates:

Christiaan Blake, Vice President, Access Services, provided the service updates and stated soon, TiM, the digital assistant, will be available for dispatchers to book, rebook, or move trips to Uber. With the digital assistant, reported situations will get responded faster. Once the digital assistant has matured and is in place, any qualifying Uber trips will be handled without the involvement of human agents, making a better situation for everyone involved. Further, the updated Interactive Voice Response (IVR) will serve MetroAccess customers by recognizing their phone numbers to provide ride status. For this, the order of information may be modified on the IVR with more immediate information about customer trip status. Mr. Blake stated customers are encouraged to use the MyTransit app as part of our messaging, along with other options i.e. use of the digital assistant, the IVR system, or speaking with agents.

The AAC is pleased to hear about the forthcoming changes and looks forward to using them. As always, the AAC will be happy to provide feedback on the enhancements.

Sincerely,

Patrick Sheehan
Chair